KAPALA KUNDALA

In this Bengali classic Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay writes about Navakumar, a city-bred young man, and his innocent bride Kapala Kundala, a child of the forest wilds. Kapala Kundala finds her new life rather dull but little does she realise that danger and excitement await her at every turn. As jealousy and revenge play havoc, a wicked plot is hatched to end her life.

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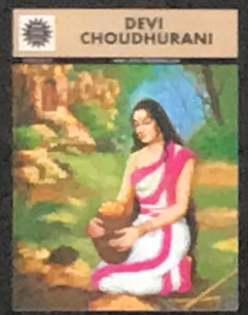

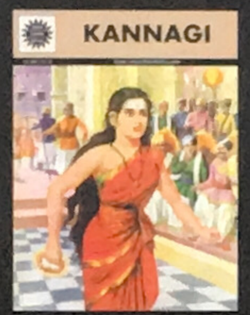

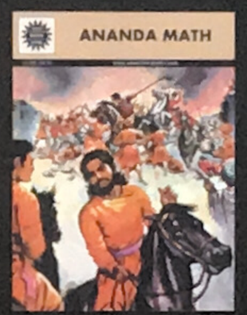

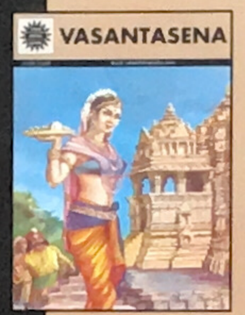

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KAPALA KUNDALA

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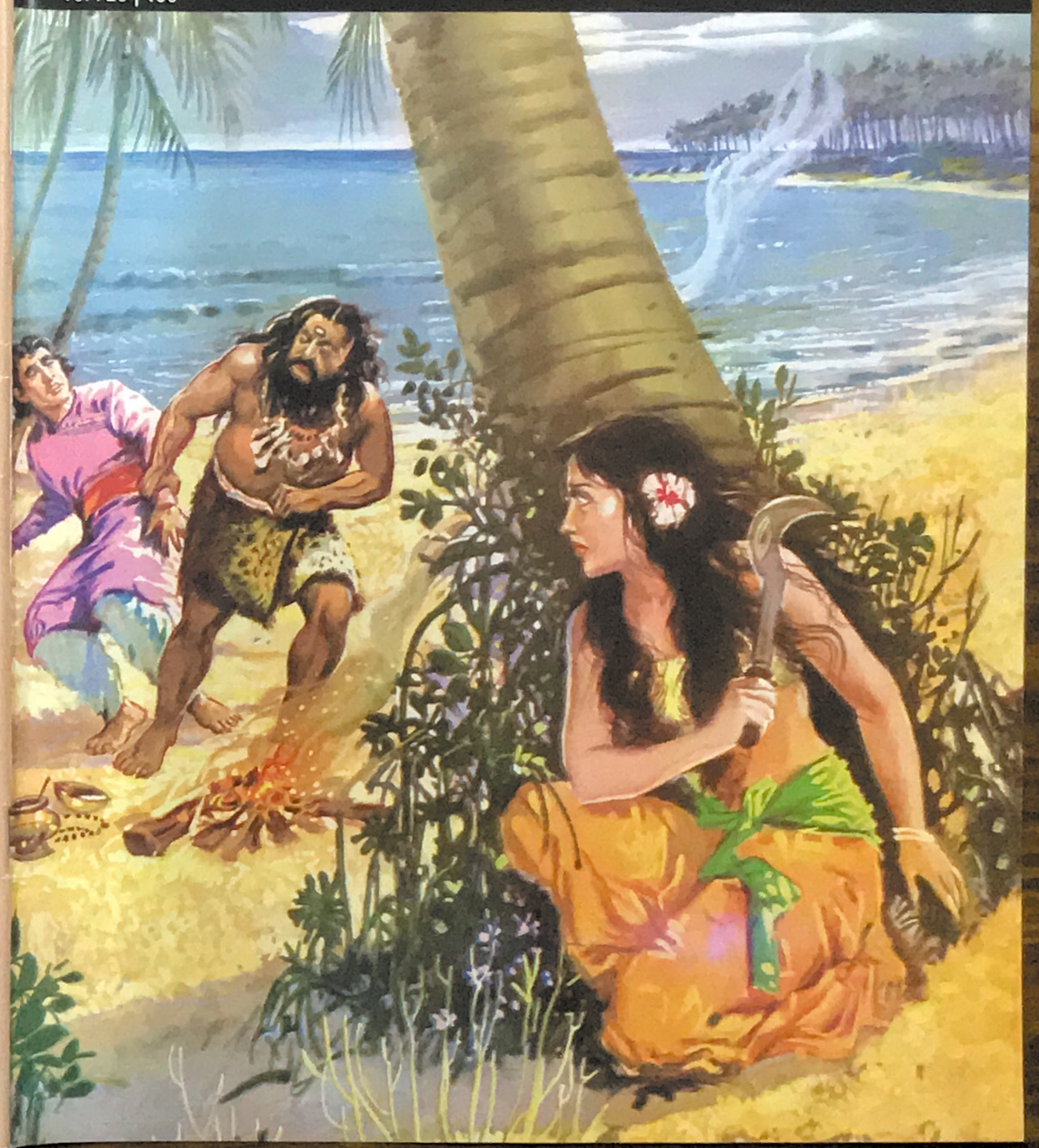


KAPALA KUNDALA

DURING THE REIGN OF AKBAR THE GREAT, A LONE BOAT WAS RETURNING FROM A VOYAGE OF PILGRIMAGE TO GANGASAGAR.* A DENSE FOG HAD DESCENDED AND, THOUGH IT WAS EARLY IN THE MORNING, NOTHING COULD BE SEEN FOR MILES. THE BOAT HAD LOST ITS WAY.

OH GOD! WE ARE LOST IF WE STRIKE AGAINST A ROCK!

IT WILL BE WORSE IF WE ARE WASHED ASHORE. THEN WE'LL BE AT THE MERCY OF WILD BEASTS IN THE JUNGLES.

PLEASE! PLEASE! REMAIN CALM. WE SHOULD FIND OUR WAY BY DAYBREAK.

*THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER HOOGHLY

NAVAKUMAR, ARE YOU SURE? SHALL WE BE ABLE TO GO BACK HOME?

WHY NOT? BUT DOESN'T THE BEAUTY OF THE SEA MAKE YOU FORGET YOUR FEARS?

THE FOG GRADUALLY BEGAN TO CLEAR

LOOK AHEAD!

THE SHORE! THE SHORE!

WE'RE SAFE!

THE TALL TREES ENCIRCLING THE SILVERY WATERS ARE LOVELY TO BEHOLD.

THEY SAILED TOWARDS THE SHORE AND DISEMBARKED.

WE ARE TIRED AND HUNGRY. LET US EAT FIRST AND THEN REST.

BUT HOW SHALL WE COOK? WE HAVE NO FIRE-WOOD.

THERE MUST BE PLENTY OF WOOD IN THAT VAST FOREST.

BUT WHO WILL GO THERE AND RISK BEING KILLED BY TIGERS?

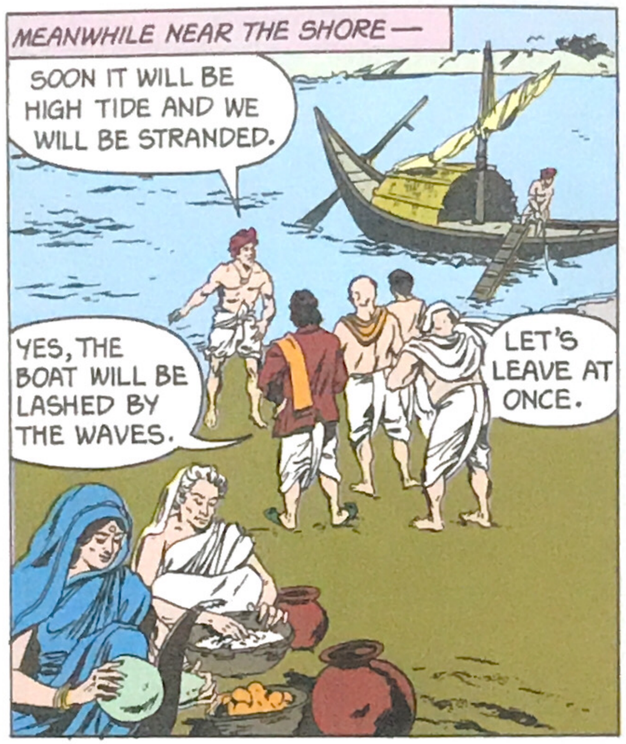
NAVAKUMAR IS A BRAVE YOUNG MAN. HE'LL DO IT.

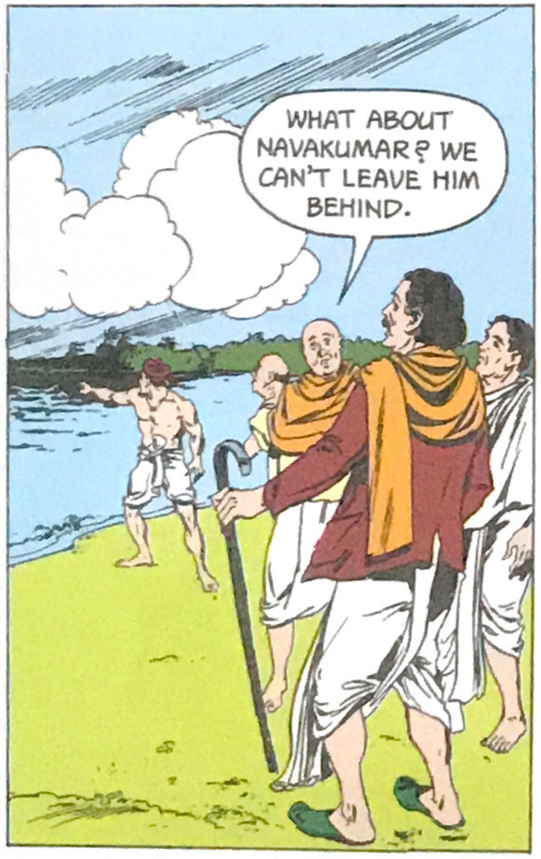
I WILL TRY. BUT WILL SOMEONE COME WITH ME?

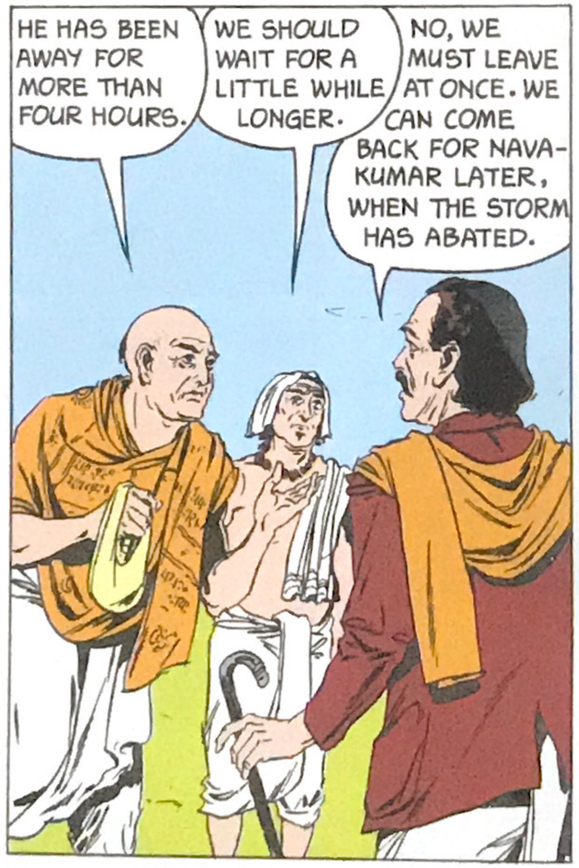
NO ONE ELSE DARED TO GO. SO NAVAKUMAR WENT INTO THE FOREST ALONE.

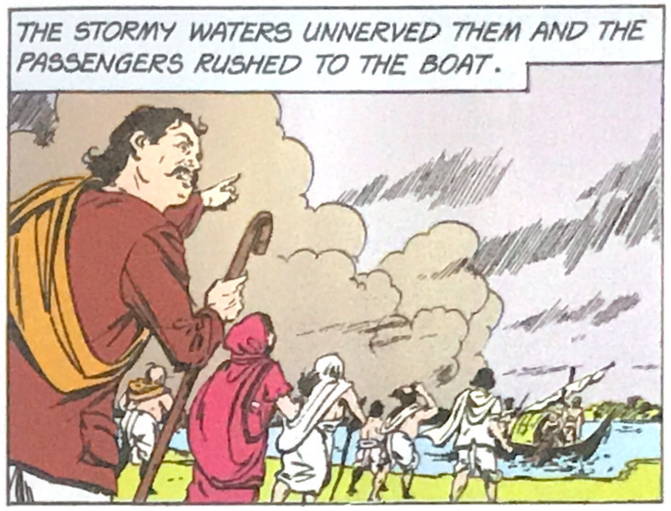
I HOPE I'LL BE ABLE TO CARRY ALL THIS WOOD.

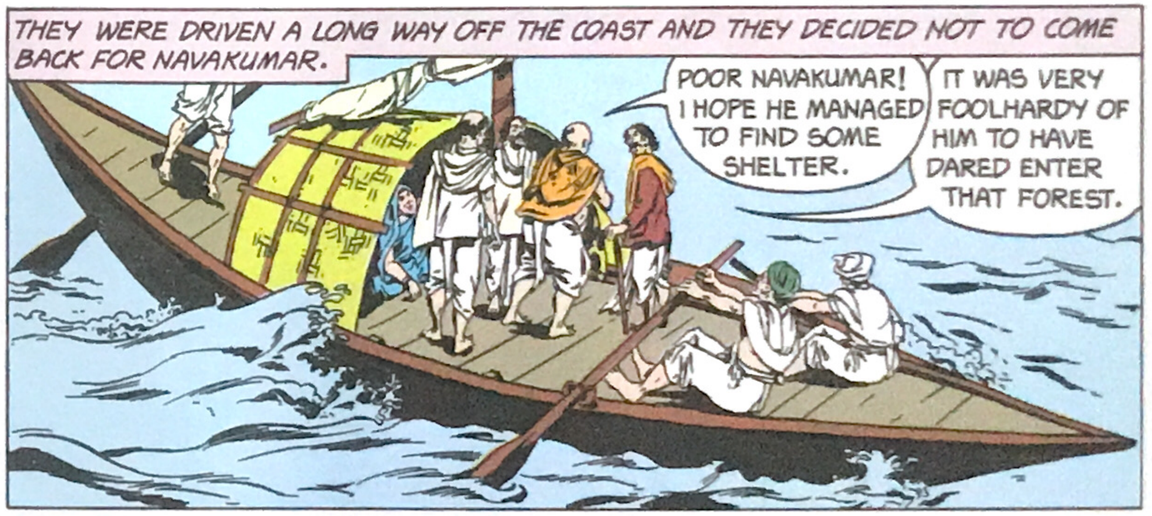
THIS IS VERY HARD WORK. I AM NOT USED TO CARRYING SUCH HEAVY LOADS.

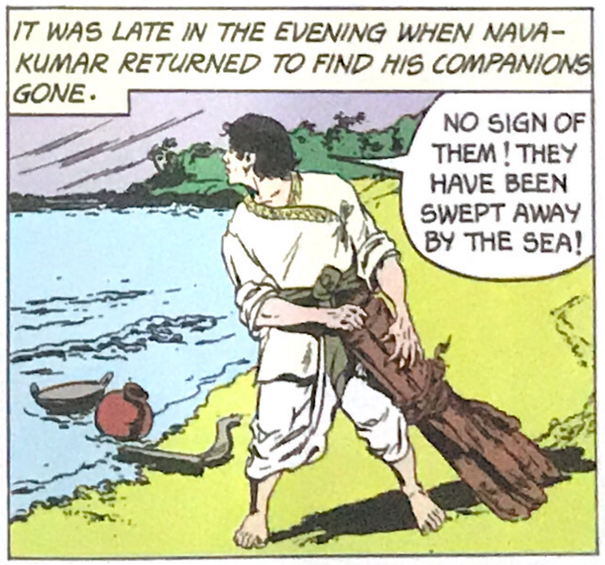

MEANWHILE NEAR THE SHORE—
SOON IT WILL BE HIGH TIDE AND WE WILL BE STRANDED.
YES, THE BOAT WILL BE LASHED BY THE WAVES.
LET'S LEAVE AT ONCE.


WHAT ABOUT NAVAKUMAR? WE CAN'T LEAVE HIM BEHIND.

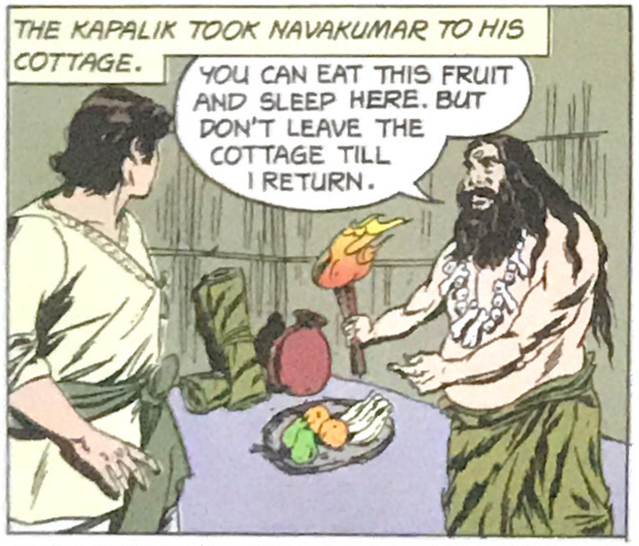

HE HAS BEEN AWAY FOR MORE THAN FOUR HOURS.
WE SHOULD WAIT FOR A LITTLE WHILE LONGER.
NO, WE MUST LEAVE AT ONCE. WE CAN COME BACK FOR NAVA-KUMAR LATER, WHEN THE STORM HAS ABATED.


THE STORMY WATERS UNNERVED THEM AND THE PASSENGERS RUSHED TO THE BOAT.

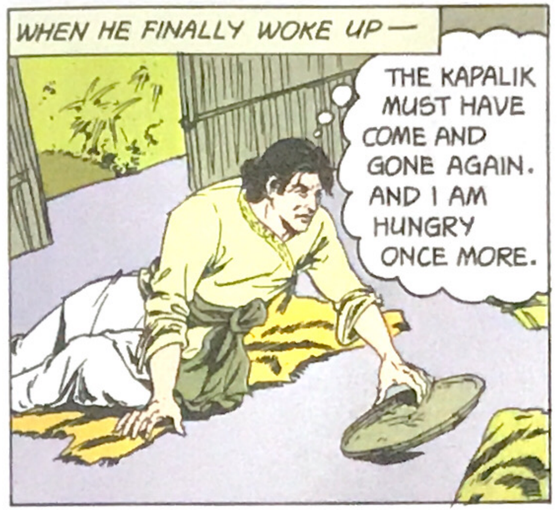

THEY WERE DRIVEN A LONG WAY OFF THE COAST AND THEY DECIDED NOT TO COME BACK FOR NAVAKUMAR.
POOR NAVAKUMAR! I HOPE HE MANAGED TO FIND SOME SHELTER.
IT WAS VERY FOOLHARDY OF HIM TO HAVE DARED ENTER THAT FOREST.

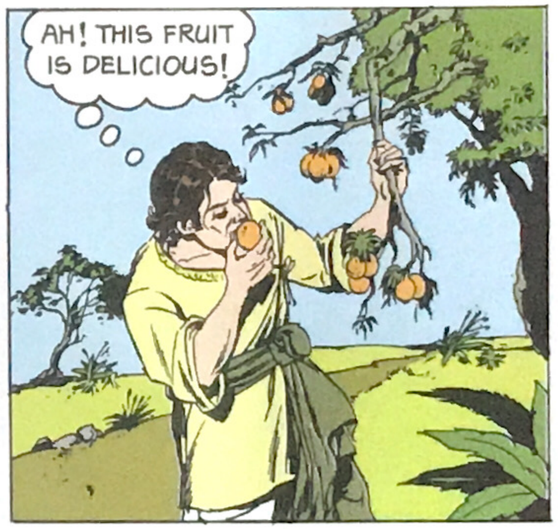

IT WAS LATE IN THE EVENING WHEN NAVA-KUMAR RETURNED TO FIND HIS COMPANIONS GONE.
NO SIGN OF THEM! THEY HAVE BEEN SWEPT AWAY BY THE SEA!

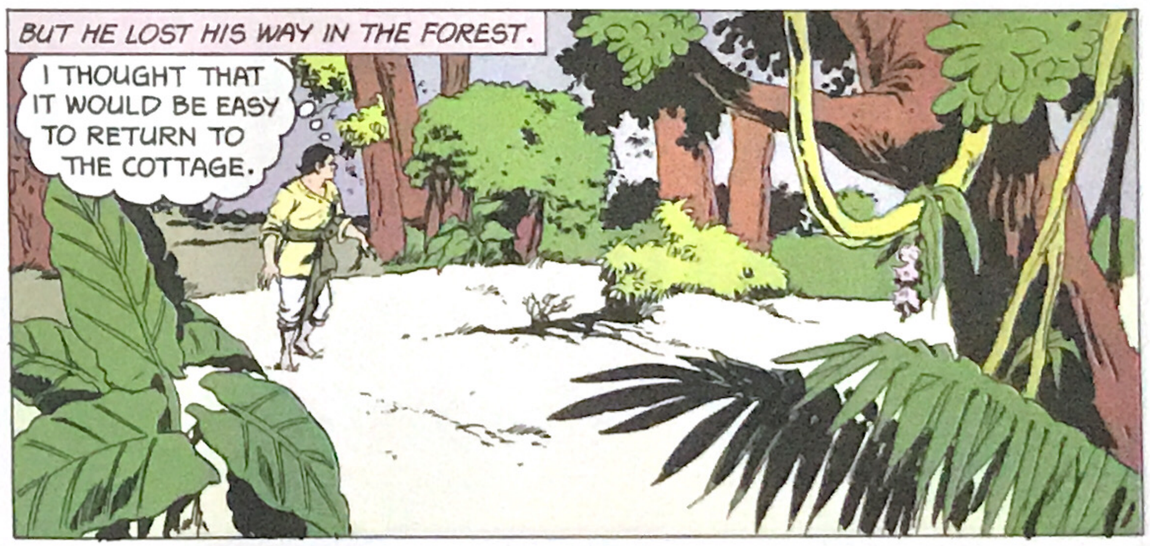
OR, PERHAPS, THEY'VE DESERTED ME! ANYWAY, I MUST FIND SHELTER FOR THE NIGHT.



* A VOTARY OF THE GODDESS KALI WHO OFFERS HUMAN SACRIFICE







SUDDENLY—

HAVE YOU LOST YOUR WAY, YOUNG MAN?

OH! YOU GAVE ME A START! WHO ARE YOU?

I AM KAPALA KUNDALA. COME WITH ME!

NAVAKUMAR FOLLOWED HER AS IF IN A TRANCE. AFTER LEADING HIM TO THE COTTAGE, THE BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN STEPPED BEHIND A BUSH AND DISAPPEARED INTO THE FOREST.

WHERE HAS SHE GONE? SHE WAS HERE A MOMENT AGO!

THE NEXT DAY—

I AM VERY ANXIOUS TO GO BACK HOME. WILL YOU PLEASE SHOW ME THE WAY?

I'LL SHOW YOU THE WAY. JUST FOLLOW ME!

THEY STARTED WALKING THROUGH THE FOREST. SUDDENLY NAVAKUMAR HEARD SOMEONE WHISPER BEHIND HIM—

DON'T GO WITH HIM! HE IS GOING TO SACRIFICE YOU TO GODDESS KALI.

MY GOD!

THE KAPALIK HEARD THE LOW WHISPERS.

KAPALA KUNDALA!

THE GIRL FLED LIKE A FRIGHTENED DEER.

LEAVE ME ALONE! I DON'T WANT TO GO WITH YOU.

BUT THE KAPALIK CAUGHT HOLD OF NAVAKUMAR.

YOU CANNOT FREE YOURSELF FROM MY GRIP.

THE KAPALIK DRAGGED HIM AWAY TO HIS PLACE OF MEDITATION...

BE CALM! ANYWAY, YOU ARE GIVING YOUR LIFE FOR A SACRED CAUSE.

...AND BOUND HIM FIRMLY.

DON'T TRY TO RESIST.

AFTER HIS PREPARATIONS FOR THE SACRIFICE WERE COMPLETED —

BUT WHERE IS MY SCIMITAR? I MUST HAVE DROPPED IT WHILE HE WAS STRUGGLING WITH ME.

THE KAPALIK WENT AWAY TO LOOK FOR THE SCIMITAR...

...WHEN KAPALA KUNDALA SUDDENLY APPEARED WITH THE SCIMITAR!

SH-SHH! DON'T MAKE A NOISE! HE MIGHT HEAR US. I'LL FREE YOU IN NO TIME.

KAPALA KUNDALA THEN LED NAVAKUMAR TO A TEMPLE IN THE FOREST AND TOLD THE PRIEST THERE THE WHOLE STORY.

...SO YOU MUST SHOW HIM THE WAY OUT OF THE FOREST.

FIRST LET ME TALK TO THIS YOUNG MAN.

THE PRIEST TOOK NAVAKUMAR INTO THE TEMPLE.

THE YOUNG LADY WILL BE IN MORTAL DANGER IF SHE STAYS HERE AFTER HELPING YOU TO ESCAPE.

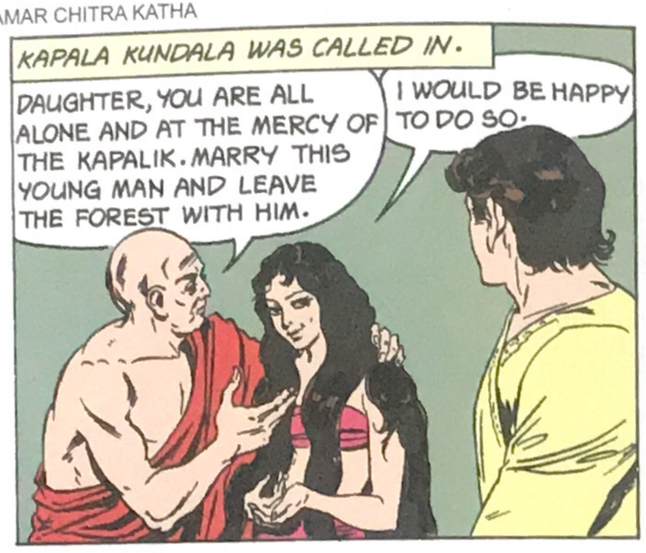
IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO SAVE HER FROM THE KAPALIK?

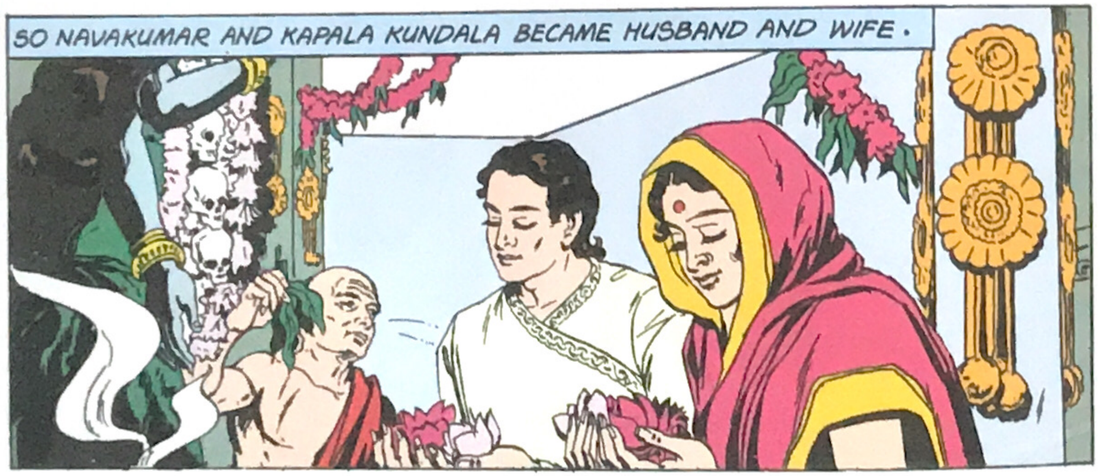
YES. YOU CAN MARRY HER, AND TAKE HER WITH YOU.

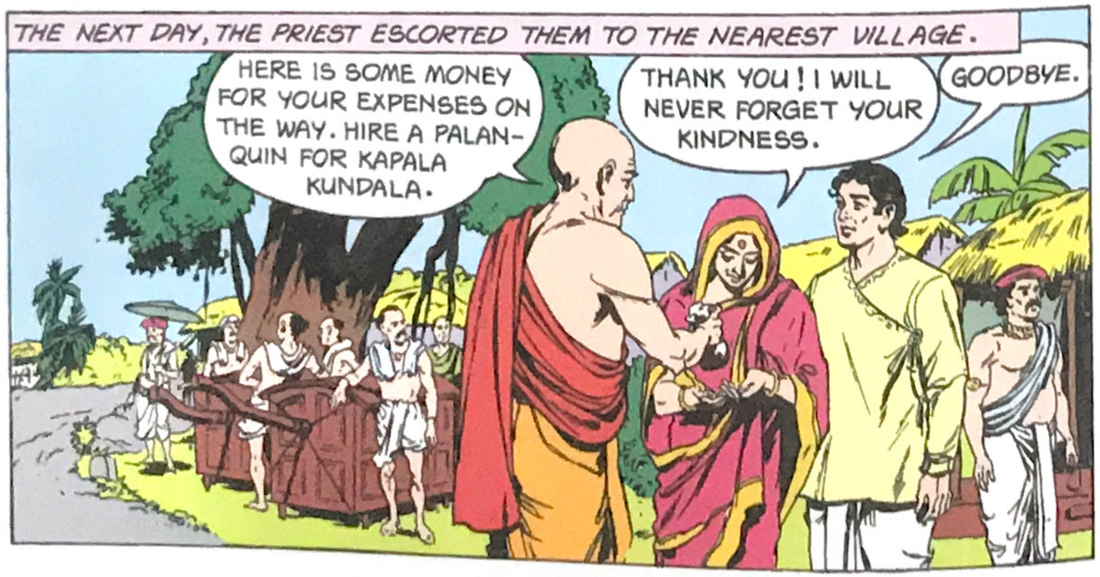
BUT....

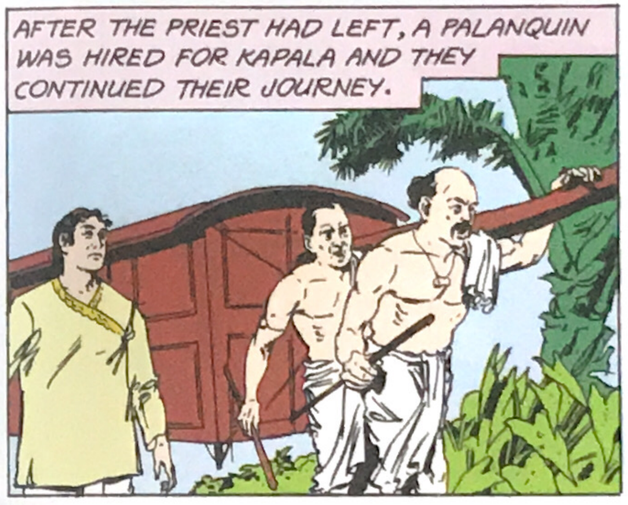
SHE IS A BRAHMAN. SHE WAS BROUGHT UP BY THE KAPALIK.

POOR GIRL! I WILL GLADLY PROTECT HER. SHE HAS SAVED MY LIFE. AND SHE'S BEAUTIFUL AND GOOD!


KAPALA KUNDALA WAS CALLED IN.
DAUGHTER, YOU ARE ALL ALONE AND AT THE MERCY OF THE KAPALIK. MARRY THIS YOUNG MAN AND LEAVE THE FOREST WITH HIM.
I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DO SO.

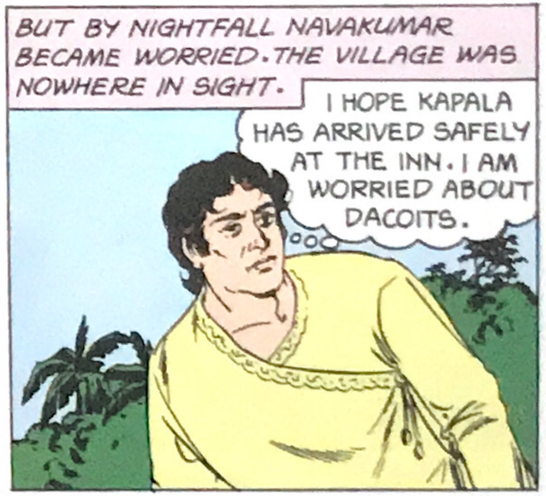

SO NAVAKUMAR AND KAPALA KUNDALA BECAME HUSBAND AND WIFE.

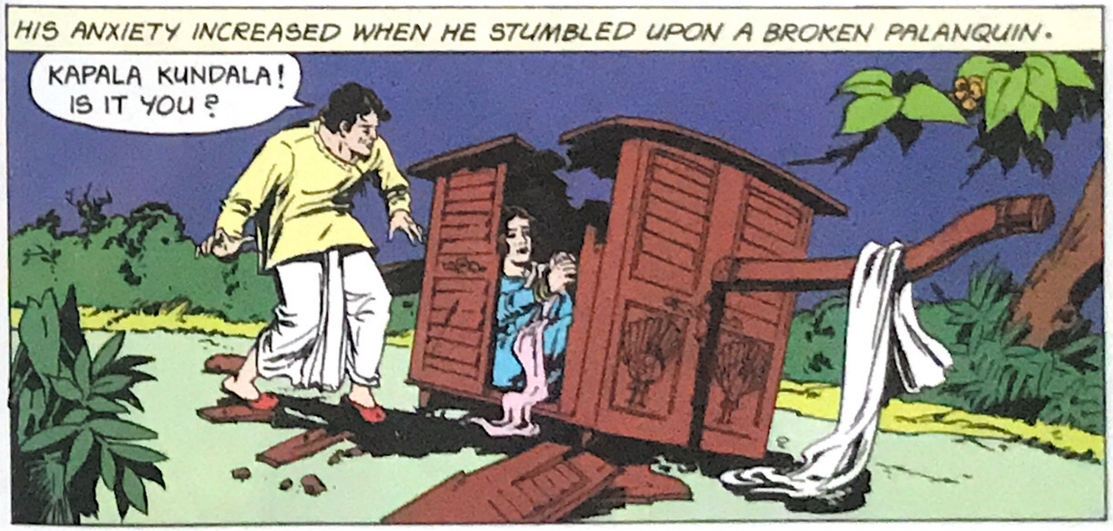

THE NEXT DAY, THE PRIEST ESCORTED THEM TO THE NEAREST VILLAGE.
HERE IS SOME MONEY FOR YOUR EXPENSES ON THE WAY. HIRE A PALANQUIN FOR KAPALA KUNDALA.
THANK YOU! I WILL NEVER FORGET YOUR KINDNESS.
GOODBYE.


AFTER THE PRIEST HAD LEFT, A PALANQUIN WAS HIRED FOR KAPALA AND THEY CONTINUED THEIR JOURNEY.

I HOPE WE REACH THE NEXT VILLAGE SOON. MY FEET ARE ACHING....

GRADUALLY HE LOST PACE WITH THE PALANQUIN.
THEY'LL WAIT FOR ME AT THE VILLAGE INN. I CAN'T HURRY. I AM FAR TOO TIRED.


BUT BY NIGHTFALL NAVAKUMAR BECAME WORRIED. THE VILLAGE WAS NOWHERE IN SIGHT.
I HOPE KAPALA HAS ARRIVED SAFELY AT THE INN. I AM WORRIED ABOUT DACOITS.


HIS ANXIETY INCREASED WHEN HE STUMBLED UPON A BROKEN PALANQUIN.
KAPALA KUNDALA! IS IT YOU?

LOOKING INSIDE, HE SAW A LADY WHOSE HANDS AND FEET WERE BOUND.

PLEASE UNTIE THESE ROPES.

OH! IT'S NOT KAPALA!

MY SERVANTS HAD JUST LEFT ME AND GONE AHEAD TO MAKE PREPARATIONS AT THE VILLAGE INN...

...WHEN SUDDENLY DACOITS ATTACKED.

THEY TOOK AWAY ALL MY BELONGINGS, WHILE MY PALANQUIN-BEARERS FLED.

HOW SHALL I REACH THE INN NOW?

YOU CAN COME WITH ME. I AM GOING TO THE INN TO JOIN MY WIFE. I HOPE SHE IS SAFE.

THE INN WAS, AFTER ALL, NOT VERY FAR AWAY, AND THEY SOON REACHED IT.

AH! MY WIFE HAS ARRIVED ALREADY. THANK GOD SHE IS SAFE.

MY MEN HAVE ARRIVED TOO. THEY'LL TAKE CARE OF ME.

LATER AT THE INN —

I DID NOT RECOGNISE HIM AT FIRST, BUT I AM SURE NOW. IT MUST BE HIM! I'LL SPEAK TO HIM AGAIN AND FIND OUT.

MY NAME IS MATI BIBI. I HAVE COME TO THANK YOU.

THIS IS MY WIFE, KAPALA KUNDALA. I AM NAVAKUMAR SHARMA OF SAPTAGRAM.

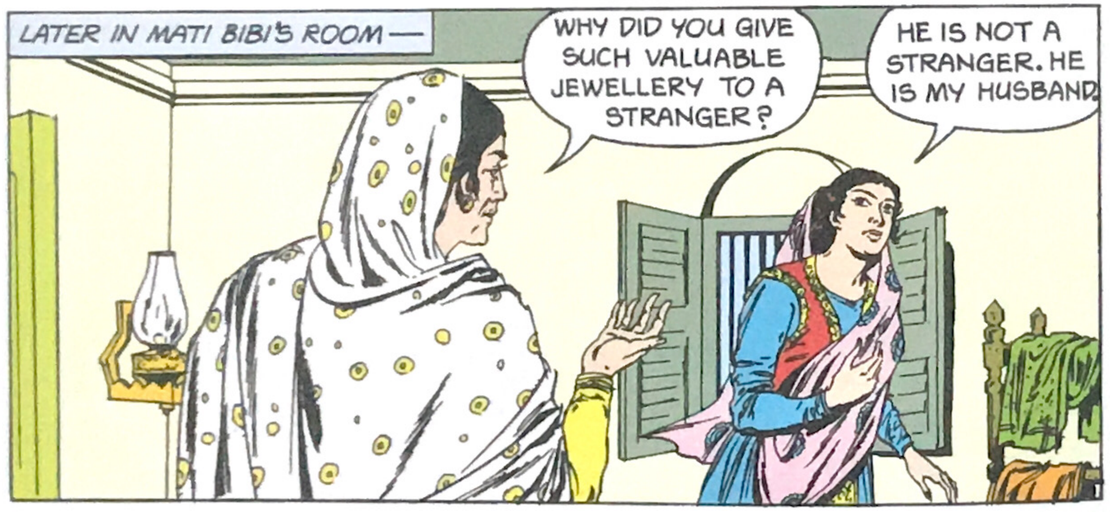
SO IT IS HIM!

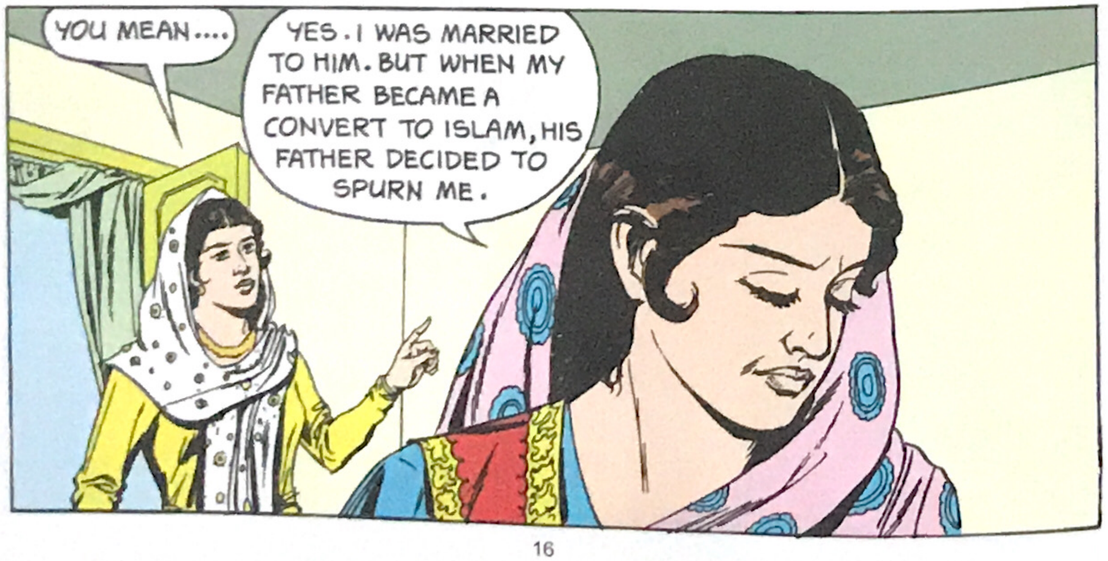
PLEASE ACCEPT THESE ORNAMENTS AS TOKENS OF MY GRATITUDE.

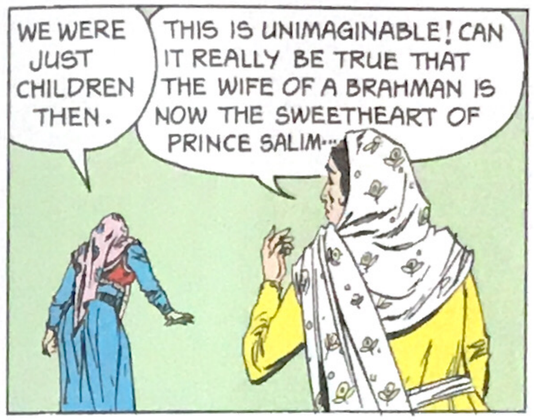
BUT THESE ARE VERY VALUABLE ORNAMENTS!

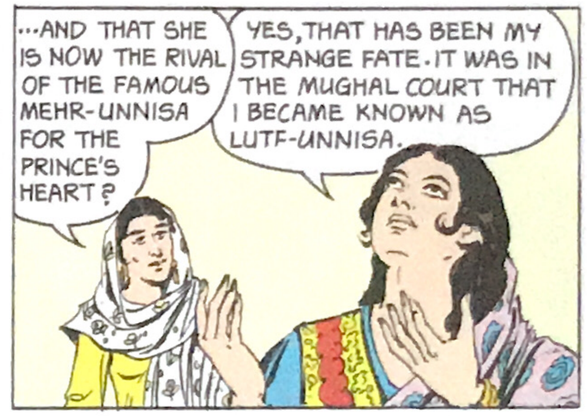
IT'S NOTHING! THE ORNAMENTS I WAS WEARING WERE STOLEN BY THE DACOITS, BUT...

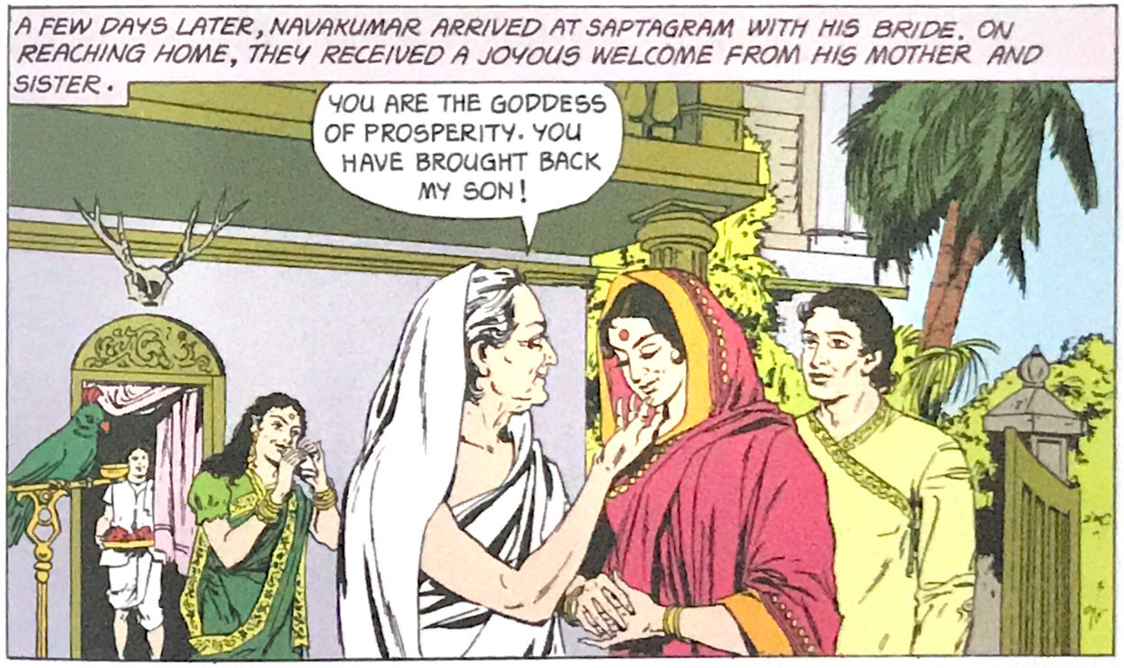
...I STILL HAVE SOME LEFT. THESE WERE IN THE LUGGAGE WHICH MY MEN HAD ALREADY TAKEN TO THE INN.


LATER IN MATI BIBI'S ROOM —
WHY DID YOU GIVE SUCH VALUABLE JEWELLERY TO A STRANGER?
HE IS NOT A STRANGER. HE IS MY HUSBAND


YOU MEAN....
YES. I WAS MARRIED TO HIM. BUT WHEN MY FATHER BECAME A CONVERT TO ISLAM, HIS FATHER DECIDED TO SPURN ME.

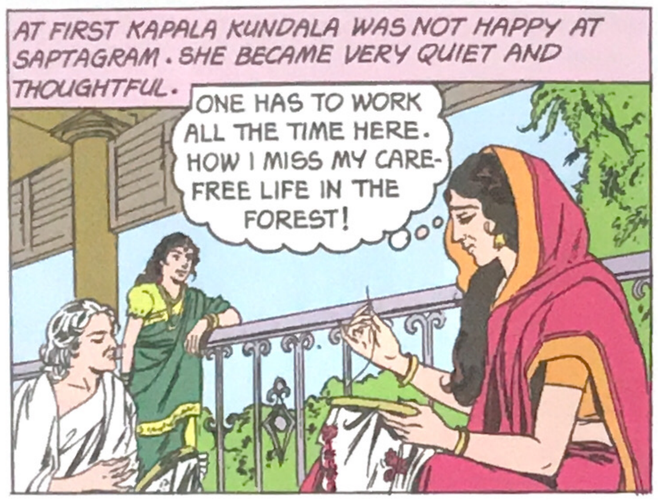

WE WERE JUST CHILDREN THEN.
THIS IS UNIMAGINABLE! CAN IT REALLY BE TRUE THAT THE WIFE OF A BRAHMAN IS NOW THE SWEETHEART OF PRINCE SALIM...


...AND THAT SHE IS NOW THE RIVAL OF THE FAMOUS MEHR-UNNISA FOR THE PRINCE'S HEART?
YES, THAT HAS BEEN MY STRANGE FATE. IT WAS IN THE MUGHAL COURT THAT I BECAME KNOWN AS LUTF-UNNISA.

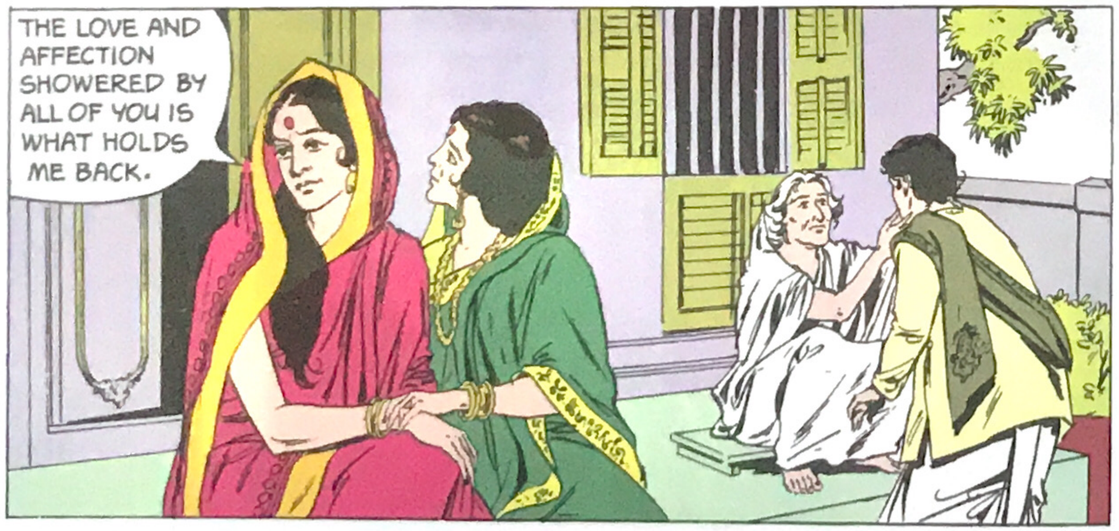

A FEW DAYS LATER, NAVAKUMAR ARRIVED AT SAPTAGRAM WITH HIS BRIDE. ON REACHING HOME, THEY RECEIVED A JOYOUS WELCOME FROM HIS MOTHER AND SISTER.
YOU ARE THE GODDESS OF PROSPERITY. YOU HAVE BROUGHT BACK MY SON!

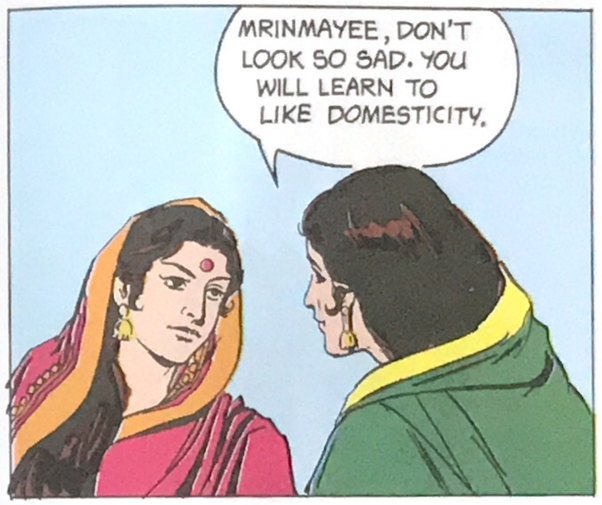
MY NAME IS SHYAMA. WHAT IS YOURS?
KAPALA KUNDALA.

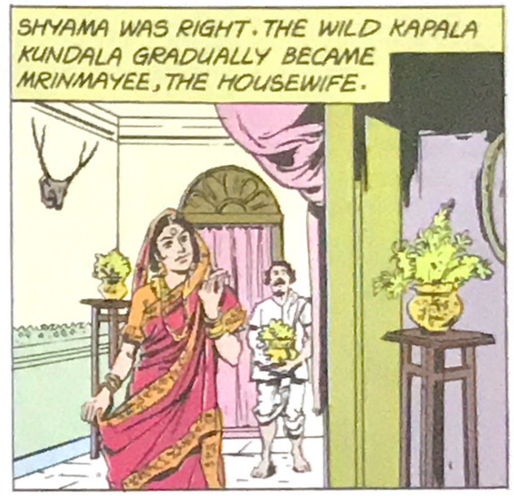
WHAT AN ODD NAME! WE'LL CALL YOU MRINMAYEE.

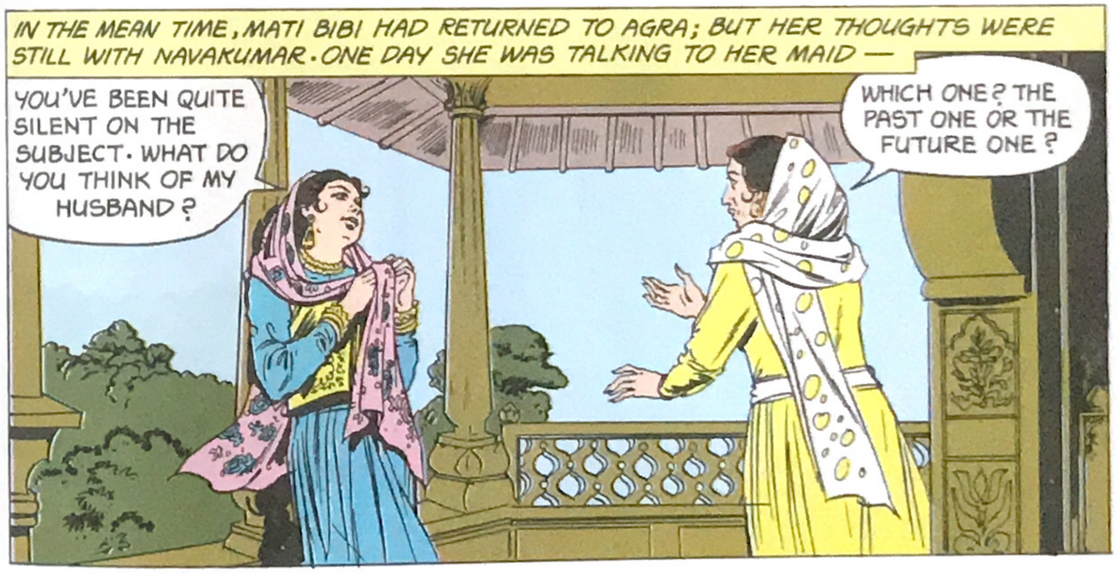

AT FIRST KAPALA KUNDALA WAS NOT HAPPY AT SAPTAGRAM. SHE BECAME VERY QUIET AND THOUGHTFUL.
ONE HAS TO WORK ALL THE TIME HERE. HOW I MISS MY CARE-FREE LIFE IN THE FOREST!

ONE DAY —
MRINMAYEE! WHY ARE YOU SO QUIET? I NEVER SEE YOU SMILE.
I AM BORED WITH ALL THESE DAILY CHORES. I FEEL LIKE RUNNING AWAY TO THE FOREST.


THE LOVE AND AFFECTION SHOWERED BY ALL OF YOU IS WHAT HOLDS ME BACK.


MRINMAYEE, DON'T LOOK SO SAD. YOU WILL LEARN TO LIKE DOMESTICITY.


SHYAMA WAS RIGHT. THE WILD KAPALA KUNDALA GRADUALLY BECAME MRINMAYEE, THE HOUSEWIFE.


IN THE MEAN TIME, MATI BIBI HAD RETURNED TO AGRA; BUT HER THOUGHTS WERE STILL WITH NAVAKUMAR. ONE DAY SHE WAS TALKING TO HER MAID —
YOU'VE BEEN QUITE SILENT ON THE SUBJECT. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MY HUSBAND?
WHICH ONE? THE PAST ONE OR THE FUTURE ONE?

THE PAST IS THE ONLY FUTURE FOR ME.
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PRINCE?

LET HIM MARRY MEHR-UNNISA.

JUST THEN AN ATTENDANT CAME IN.

HAVE YOU HEARD? EMPEROR AKBAR IS NO MORE. PRINCE SALIM WILL BE CROWNED SOON.

CONGRATULATIONS, BEGUM SAHIBA.

I AM NOT A BEGUM. I AM LEAVING AGRA RIGHT NOW!

YOU MUST BE OUT OF YOUR MIND!

MATI BIBI LEFT AGRA TO SETTLE DOWN AT SAPTAGRAM.

EVEN HERE I AM NOT HAPPY. I WON'T BE— TILL I HAVE SUCCEEDED IN MY OBJECTIVE.

ONE DAY SHE SUMMONED NAVAKUMAR.

TAKE ME AS YOUR WIFE.

HOW CAN YOU SUGGEST SUCH A THING! YOU KNOW I AM ALREADY MARRIED.

IF YOU CAN'T TAKE ME AS YOUR WIFE THEN ACCEPT ME AS YOUR MAID.

THAT CANNOT BE. A POOR BRAHMAN CANNOT TAKE A RICH WOMAN OF THE COURT AS HIS MAID.

I WILL OFFER ALL MY BELONGINGS TO YOU. DON'T YOU SEE THAT I HAVE GIVEN UP EVEN THE THRONE OF AGRA FOR YOU?

YOU ARE FREE TO GO BACK TO AGRA.

MATI BIBI BECAME VERY ANGRY.

YOU CAN'T ESCAPE ME. WHEN I WANT SOMETHING, I GET IT.

HER ANGRY GESTURE REVIVED A CHILDHOOD MEMORY IN NAVAKUMAR.

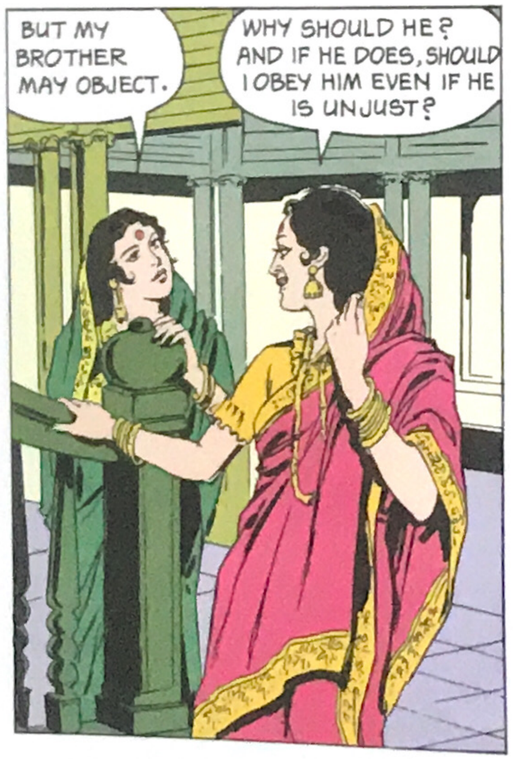
JUST BECAUSE I AM YOUR WIFE YOU CANNOT ORDER ME AROUND LIKE THIS!

HE LOOKED AT HER KEENLY.
WHO ARE YOU? ANSWER ME!
I AM PADMAVATI. YOU REMEMBER ME NOW?
PADMAVATI! MY GOD!
YOU'LL HEAR FROM ME SOON. GOODBYE!
WITHOUT WAITING FOR HIS REPLY, SHE LEFT THE ROOM. DUMBFOUNDED, NAVAKUMAR STARTED TO GO OUT.
POOR PADMAVATI! HOW CAN I TAKE HER BACK NOW? THAT WOULD BE UNTHINKABLE IN OUR SOCIETY.
TWO DAYS LATER —
HOW DO YOU LIKE MY DISGUISE?
EXCELLENT! BUT WHAT ARE YOU AFTER?
FIRST, KAPALA KUNDALA'S DEATH. SECOND, REUNION WITH MY HUSBAND.

DISGUISED AS A MAN, MATI BIBI WENT TO THE FOREST NEAR NAVAKUMAR'S HOUSE TO WAIT FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO CARRY OUT HER PLANS. HOWEVER, HER ATTENTION WAS DIVERTED.
THIS IS FOR KAPALA KUNDALA....
KAPALA KUNDALA! I MUST FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS.
GOING NEARER SHE SAW THE KAPALIK PERFORMING SOME RITES AND CHANTING THE NAME "KAPALA KUNDALA" REPEATEDLY. SUDDENLY THE KAPALIK BECAME AWARE OF HER.
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I AM INTERESTED IN KAPALA KUNDALA TOO. WHAT HAVE YOU AGAINST HER?
I BROUGHT HER UP, BUT SHE DECEIVED ME. SHE RAN AWAY AND MARRIED NAVAKUMAR. I WANT HER TO DIE.
I ALSO DESIRE HER DEATH.
AND SHE TOLD HIM HER STORY.
I WILL TELL YOU HOW TO BRING ABOUT HER DEATH. LISTEN.
THE TWO BEGAN TO PLOT.

MEANWHILE —
MRINMAYEE, I NEED A MEDICINAL HERB FROM THE FOREST. BUT IT'S GOING TO BE DIFFICULT....
WHY? WHAT'S THE PROBLEM, SHYAMA?

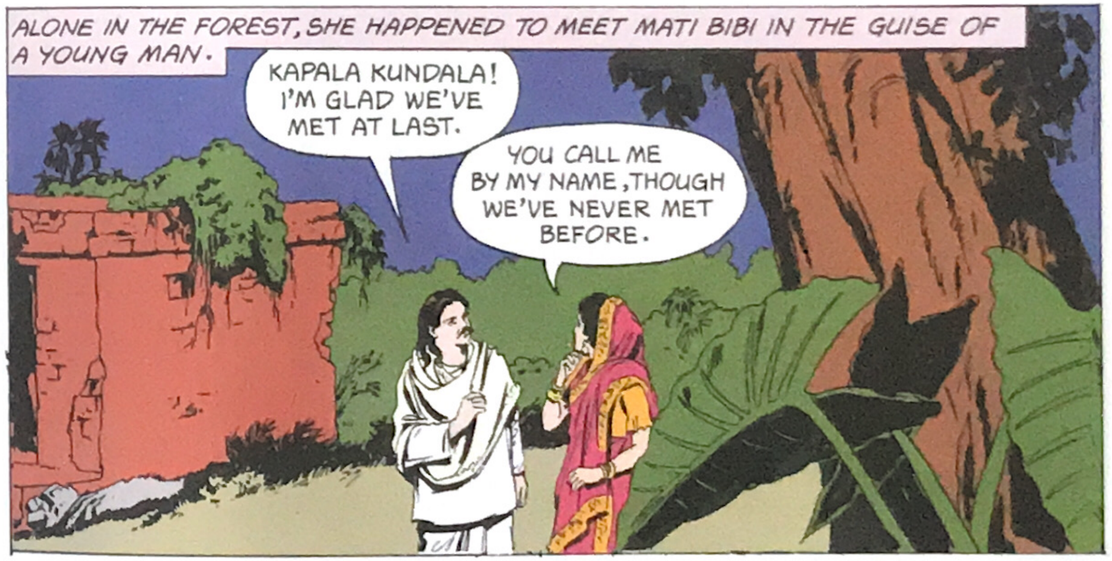
THE HERB MUST BE PLUCKED BY A WOMAN EXACTLY AT MIDNIGHT. AND SHE MUST BE ALONE. OTHERWISE IT WON'T HAVE THE DESIRED EFFECT.
YOU KNOW THAT I DON'T FEAR THE JUNGLE. I'LL GET IT FOR YOU.


BUT MY BROTHER MAY OBJECT.
WHY SHOULD HE? AND IF HE DOES, SHOULD I OBEY HIM EVEN IF HE IS UNJUST?

THAT NIGHT SHE WAS PREPARING TO STEAL AWAY INTO THE FOREST, BUT —
MRINMAYEE! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO THE FOREST, TO FETCH A HERB FOR SHYAMA.

AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT?
YES.

SHE EXPLAINED WHY SHE HAD TO GO ALONE. NAVAKUMAR RELUCTANTLY LET HER GO.


ALONE IN THE FOREST, SHE HAPPENED TO MEET MATI BIBI IN THE GUISE OF A YOUNG MAN.
KAPALA KUNDALA! I'M GLAD WE'VE MET AT LAST.
YOU CALL ME BY MY NAME, THOUGH WE'VE NEVER MET BEFORE.

DON'T BE AFRAID. I AM A WOMAN AS YOU ARE. THERE IS A REASON FOR THIS DISGUISE.

MATI BIBI LED KAPALA KUNDALA TO THE PLACE WHERE THE KAPALIK WAS PERFORMING HIS RITES.

KAPALA KUNDALA MUST BE DESTROYED....

YOU SEE! YOU ARE IN GREAT DANGER. IF YOU FOLLOW MY ADVICE, YOU MAY BE SAVED.

KAPALA KUNDALA RECOGNISED THE KAPALIK IMMEDIATELY AND WAS PETRIFIED.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

WE MUST KEEP A WATCH ON HIM FOR A FEW DAYS AND THEN DECIDE WHAT TO DO.

MEET ME HERE EVERY EVENING.

I'LL DO AS YOU SAY.

KAPALA KUNDALA KEPT HER WORD, BUT SHE SAID NOTHING ABOUT IT TO HER HUSBAND. A FEW DAYS LATER—

MRINMAYEE IS GOING OUT AGAIN! AND SECRETLY! I MUST FOLLOW HER TO SEE WHERE SHE IS GOING.

SHE COMES HERE TO MEET THIS YOUNG MAN!

NOW YOU CAN SEE FOR YOURSELF HOW THINGS ARE.

MY GOD! IT'S YOU!

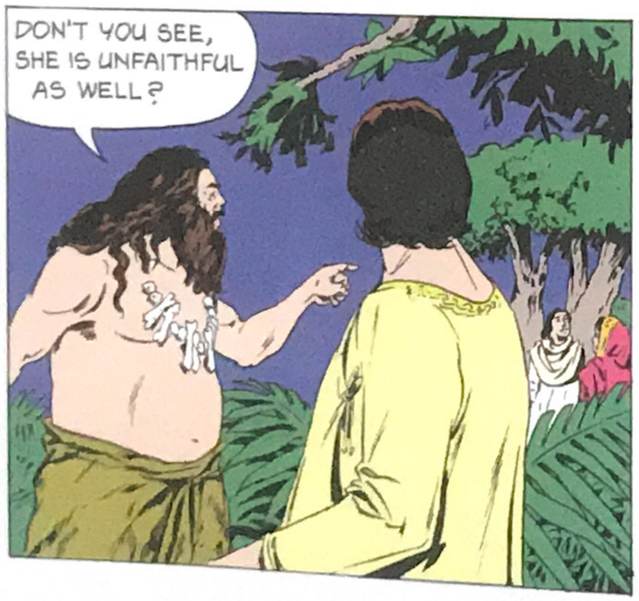
DON'T BE AFRAID, NAVAKUMAR! IT'S TRUE I WAS ONCE GOING TO SACRIFICE YOU TO THE GODDESS KALI, BUT I HAVE BECOME OLD NOW AND CANNOT HARM YOU.

KAPALA KUNDALA, HOWEVER, DISPLEASED KALI WHEN SHE RESCUED YOU.

IF SHE HAD NOT DONE THAT, YOU WOULD HAVE KILLED ME!

I WAS ONLY THE AGENT. IT WAS KALI'S WISH. BUT NOW SHE WANTS KAPALA KUNDALA'S BLOOD.

YOU ALSO DISPLEASED THE GODDESS BY RUNNING AWAY. NOW YOU CAN ATONE BY SACRIFICING YOUR WIFE TO KALI.
YOU ARE CRAZY!


DON'T YOU SEE, SHE IS UNFAITHFUL AS WELL?

JEALOUSY GAINED THE UPPER HAND.
I'LL DO IT. YES, SHE IS UNFAITHFUL TO ME.

THE NEXT EVENING—
MRINMAYEE! COME HERE.

WHAT IS IT? I'M BUSY. I'M JUST GETTING READY TO GO OUT.

I KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING! YOU ARE GOING TO THE FOREST!
WHAT!

I'LL TAKE YOU THERE.

NAVAKUMAR FORCED HER TO ACCOMPANY HIM.

MRINMAYEE! THE TIME HAS COME TO ANSWER FOR YOUR SINS. I AM TAKING YOU TO THE KAPALIK.

BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND....

YOU HAVE BEEN UNFAITHFUL TO ME.

THAT'S NOT TRUE. HOWEVER, I DON'T WISH TO DEFEND MYSELF....

I'D RATHER DIE THAN BE SUSPECTED BY YOU.

IS SHE INNOCENT?

AS THEY CAME NEAR THE PLACE OF SACRIFICE, NAVAKUMAR SUDDENLY CAME TO HIS SENSES.

THAT IS THE MAN WHO WANTED TO KILL ME!

AND THIS IS THE WOMAN WHO SAVED ME! HOW CAN I KILL HER AT HIS SUGGESTION?

MRINMAYEE! WHY DON'T YOU SHOW ME THE LIGHT? WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME THAT WHAT I SAW WAS AN ILLUSION?

IT WAS! YOU THOUGHT I WAS MEETING A MAN, BUT IT WAS A WOMAN IN DISGUISE!

I BELIEVE YOU, MRINMAYEE. FORGIVE ME. I AM NOT WORTHY OF YOU.

THE FOREST MAKES US TAKE LEAVE OF OUR SENSES. LET'S GO AWAY FROM HERE QUICKLY.

IT HAD ALL STARTED IN THE FOREST AND WAS ABOUT TO END IN THE FOREST. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS TO THE EVIL KAPALIK AND MATI BIBI. THEY WERE LEFT IN THE DARK WHILE NAVAKUMAR AND KAPALA KUNDALA CAME BACK TO THE LIGHT.